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My Duty Towards Foreign Missions

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WHY does the appeal to support foreign missions leave so many professing Christians cold? They will give liberally to a hospital, to work in our city slums, to a hundred other charitable causes, but when the cause of foreign missions is pleaded, they draw back or give grudgingly. Can we discover any reasons for this strange state of affairs? I believe that the reasons are to be found under one or other of the following heads:—

1. Lack of Interest Due to Ignorance

The majority of people know nothing or very little about missions, and hence are naturally uninterested in them. We cannot be keen about anything unless we know about it. It is impossible, for example, to feel any interest in China unless we have either some knowledge of the country, its history, civilization, and problems, or some personal link with it such as a business connexion. Those who have made a study of foreign missions know what a fascinating study it is, how there is nothing more interesting than to compare other religions with Christianity, seeing where they differ or agree; or to watch the effect of Christianity as it comes in contact with a civilization of another kind, or with a savage life which is uncivilized.

Could anything, for instance, be more worth study at this present moment than India? India is awakening to a sense of her nationhood is claiming liberty and self-government. Her old customs, modes of thought, and religions are giving way before the impact of western civilization. A new future awaits her. What kind of an India is to come out of all this striving and unrest? Can Christianity give India the new life which she is seeking? If so, will it be Christianity just as England knows it; or may not some fresh expression of the religion of Jesus be needed for India? That is a living problem to-day, intensely interesting and important, and vitally connected with the subject of foreign missions. And there are similar problems in every part of the world. But they will be a mere blank to us unless we read about them. Knowledge and interest go together in this matter of foreign missions as in all other matters.

2. An Inadequate Presentation of the Cause of Foreign Missions

Interest in foreign missions is often lacking because the cause has not been presented in the best way. Preachers and speakers too often fail to set out the cause in its bigness and splendour, as something which is concerned not merely with a few scattered congregations of Japanese or Chinese Christians, but with the development of nations and races, with the whole future civilization of the world, with the contact of East and West and the immeasurable results which that must have for humanity. I wish here to guard against a misunderstand-

ing. The deepest missionary motive is the desire to win souls for Christ. It springs from an appreciation of what the salvation which is in Christ really means, and it carries with it the conviction that every soul, be it Indian or African, is of priceless value in God's eyes. The missionary enthusiast therefore must be interested in hearing of the advance of Christianity in the smallest village of the most remote country, and must rejoice if he learns that only two or three Indian labourers have been won for Christ. But when you want to create missionary interest I think the larger appeal, about which I am writing, is most likely to succeed. And it is this larger appeal that most naturally suggests itself at this moment in the world's history, when the world is becoming "everybody's world," and the talk is of nationality and racial forces. Some one has said that this generation has learned "to think in continents," and certainly one result of the war has been to compel us to take wider views, and to realize that what affects one part of the world must inevitably affect all parts.

"Thinking in Continents"

Now if Christianity is the universal religion, if it is suited to all races (and it has been long enough in existence to show that it is), then the question of foreign missions is nothing less than the question of the future development of humanity. We need to "think in continents" about foreign missions. We need to go back to the days when our savage, painted ancestors roamed over the British Isles, and to compare their condition with ours to-day. It

was the coming of the missionary in early days to England that put our nation on the road of development which it has since followed. We want to think what Christianity has done for our own national life, and then to realize that it must make the whole difference to the world whether the big developments which are taking place in India, China, and Africa are to be on Christian or non-Christian lines. No one who will seriously face the possibilities of the situation can fail to grasp their gravity. I have mentioned India's desire for self-government, and the awakening of her sense of nationhood. Let us think also of the great mass movements in five different areas among the outcastes. Here are thousands of Indians seeking to become Christians, eagerly demanding instruction. How this movement may react upon the whole caste system of Indian society! Already the caste classes are becoming seriously alarmed and are offering to receive the outcastes into caste. A greater or more urgent missionary problem never faced the Church. There is a crying need for schools, teachers, colleges, churches. Is this opportunity to be let slip? Turn to China, and you find a nation of 350 million souls rousing itself to adopt western civilization, determined that it will no longer be left behind in the race. Schools and colleges are being built at a rapid rate by the Chinese. Western literature is being eagerly bought, and not least the Bible and Christian literature. The movement for the emancipation of women is rapidly spreading. There is a crusade against foot-binding. Religious liberty has been conceded. Not a few Chinese in high

position, members of Parliament and others, are Christians. The vital question is this —is China to become westernized with or without Christianity? A nation of this size is going to be a power in the world. The quality of its influence will be determined by the quality of its moral and religious standards. China with Christ, and China without Christ —they will not mean the same thing for the world.

Once more, think of Mohammedanism. It is a missionary religion, and in many parts of Africa the crescent moves faster than the cross. Where pagan peoples embrace Islam their subsequent conversion to Christianity is rendered much more difficult. The need is urgent for a wide extension of missions among tribes as yet untouched by Islam. But the real interest at this moment lies in reflecting on the situation which the war has created in relation to Mohammedanism. The defeat of Turkey and the rise to power of the Arab kingdom of Hejaz opens up the whole problem of the future centre of authority, political and spiritual, in Islam. Mohammedan soldiers in the allied armies have been fighting loyally against their co-religionists. Where it has been possible to give relief to sufferers in the war in districts lately under the rule of the Sultan, such relief has been given without regard to the creed of the recipient. In Palestine and Mesopotamia the inhabitants have had an object lesson in the administrative methods of the British Government. All this must result in the breaking down of barriers and the promotion of more friendly feeling. It is not too much to

say that the rigidity of Mohammedanism is giving way. Now is the very time for a forward movement on the part of Christianity.

A Creative Epoch

The greatness of the present opportunity—can there be any doubt about it? We stand on the threshold of one of the creative epochs in the world's history. Here is God's answer to our prayers of the past that He would make a way for the extension of His Kingdom. Here is God saying to us: "Behold I make all things new." The situation calls for a wide extension of missionary work abroad, and of sympathy and interest at home. It calls to every Christian to reconsider without bias or prejudice his attitude to foreign missions, seeing what profound issues are involved for the whole of humanity.

Let me illustrate the kind of way in which the appeal for foreign missions may be made on a big scale. We may approach it from the side of man's search for truth, and of God's response to that search. In all religions there is some truth. God has nowhere left Himself without witness. And all the more developed races have ideals of conduct which provide them with a standard for regulating life. Can there be anything more interesting than to study these ideals and to compare them with Christianity? Jesus said that He came "not to destroy, but to fulfil." He was not speaking only of the Jewish religion, but of all man's efforts everywhere to find God. We are to see in Christianity that which sets the crown on all this effort. Whatever is true in any non-Chris-

tian religion is taken up by Christianity and given new life. It finds its fulfilment in Christ, Who is *the* Truth. And as we study these other systems we must study them sympathetically, and be on the look-out for any truth which they may contain, and see in it a prophecy and promise of something better. The missionary, in like manner, when he goes out to India or China, must search for foundations in the heathen religions on which he can build the fuller truth which he has to preach. If he begins by telling his heathen hearers that their religion is entirely wrong, he will naturally repel them. But if he can say to them, " I find that you believe this or that, or have this or that ideal of conduct. Well, in my religion there is something akin to what you hold; now let me tell you about it "—if he adopts that tone, not only is he more likely to interest them, but he is presenting Christianity as it ought to be presented, as the one universal, final religion which comprehends all the partial truth scattered about in other religions. In some such large manner I should make my missionary appeal, urging those who heard me to consider whether there could be any finer or more splendid work than to give the full truth to men who were walking in the twilight of half truths.

The Kingdom of Christ

Or we might take the thought of the Kingdom, that thought which bulked so large in our Lord's teaching. We might think of the kingdom of humanity, of mankind as a unity, drawing closer together as civilization advances,

and moving towards its distant goal. What is that goal? St. Paul describes it as the summing up of all things in Christ, the universal reign of Christ, the day when all men shall own Him Lord. Now the point is, that each race or nation has its special contribution to make to the completeness of that Kingdom. India means something for God which England can never mean. China can bring to Christ qualities and gifts which are very different from what America can bring. Christ needs all the qualities and gifts of all humanity if He is to complete His Kingdom. It is a big thought, and surely it is an inspiring one, this of a great redemptive purpose which God is working out through the ages, the building up of a rich kingdom of mankind, in which all the varied gifts of men are to find their consecration in Him, Who is for all men the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. "And the nations shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it." So it is said of the Holy City, that vision of perfected humanity with which the Bible closes. We need big thoughts in these days when we give ourselves so little time to think at all. We need, as Emerson said, "to hitch our wagon to a star." To think bigly lifts us out of our pettiness, and gives a new spirit to life. And there is nothing bigger than foreign missions save God Himself.

3. A Group of Common Objections to Missions

There has been a wonderful change in the general attitude towards missions in the last

ten years. The Press no longer sneers, but admits missionary articles into its columns. The arm-chair critic of foreign missions, though not extinct, is dying out. All this is to the good; but there still linger in many minds various objections to missionary effort, which I will try briefly to meet.

(*a*) There are Plenty of Heathen at Home; Convert them first

This is, perhaps, one of the commonest objections. Now it is perfectly true that there is much missionary work to be done at home; but can it be said that it is being neglected? The main energies of the Churches are devoted to home work, which receives far more money than is given to work abroad. Is there any one in England beyond reach of a place of worship, or unable to get Christian instruction if he desires it? But in the mission field you have one missionary for a district the size of an English county. Either the Gospel is a Gospel for all men, or it is not. If it is, the heathen have a right to hear it, and we have no excuse for not giving it to them because there happen to be unconverted men and women at home. We must keep some scale of proportion in this matter. And, then, statistics show that those who support foreign missions are usually among the keenest supporters of home missions. If you were distributing food, and there was not enough to go all round, you might reasonably argue that you should first feed your starving people at home. But spiritual truth is not exhausted by being distributed. We rob no

one at home of the chance of learning about God by making it possible for a Chinese to learn about God. On the contrary, where there is a keen missionary spirit in a parish, there will also be keenness in parish matters. Spiritual keenness is by its very nature expansive. It spreads and brightens as it burns; just as the central core of heat in a fire grows hotter the larger the fire becomes. I can see no force in this objection.

(*b*) Foreign Missions Do No Good

He is a bold man who will to-day assert this in face of the proved results which missions have achieved. I do not suppose there are many who would venture to make quite such a sweeping statement. What I think the objection really comes to is this: (i) the good done by missions is out of all proportion to the cost; (ii) converts from heathenism are not very satisfactory Christians. Let us examine these two objections in turn.

(i) The Question of Cost

First, as to the question of cost. Can you estimate spiritual results in £ s. d.? What in pounds sterling do you consider to be the worth of a soul? If it is our duty as Christians to support foreign missions, we should do so in loyalty to Christ, even though no conversions followed. The missionary cannot convert a heathen. Only God can do that. All the missionary can do is to deliver his message. He must leave results to God. Results have followed abundantly in all parts of the world; and often in the history of the missionary socie-

ties, when, owing to apparent failure, the home committee was on the point of closing a mission, the tide has turned, and Christianity has rapidly advanced in that very district. In some missions, of course, progress is far more slow than in others; but only the crassest ignorance can maintain to-day that missions have produced no great results.

(ii) The Character of Converts

Secondly, what about the character of the converts? I have often heard it said, "Chinese or Indian Christians are such bad servants. They are untrustworthy, lie, steal, cheat. I would far rather have a heathen for a servant." Now the first thing we should ascertain is the proportion of Christian converts who become servants? Again, we should find out on whose authority the servant is regarded as a Christian. He is said to be untrustworthy and to lie, and yet his statement that he is a Christian—a claim which an unscrupulous person desirous of being engaged by a European would naturally make—is accepted without demur! Next, we should ascertain what experience of the work of missions the person who brings the objection has had. Is he a globe-trotter, who has met at a seaport with some unsatisfactory convert? Has he travelled through the mission field carefully observing, or is he passing on some criticism which he has never taken the trouble to investigate? Are there no untrustworthy servants in England? But you would not condemn all home missions on that ground, or suggest that the parish churches should close down. And why exact

from a heathen convert a severer standard of conduct than you apply at home? As Christianity spreads in any heathen country it is only natural to expect a repetition of what we see at home; that is, the growth of nominal Christians, who give a lip adhesion to Christianity, but do not live as true Christians. Surely against this kind of objection we may with confidence set such a statement as the following, made at a Church Congress by Sir William Muir, formerly Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces of India: "Thousands have been brought over; and, in an ever-increasing ratio, converts are being brought over to Christianity. They are not shams—not paper converts, as some would have us believe—but good and honest Christians, and many of them of a high standard."

Dr. Eugene Stock, in a pamphlet, writes as follows: "In India there are now several Christians among the local officials answering to our mayors and magistrates. A Hindu farmer lately told one of our missionaries that while ninety-nine out of every hundred non-Christian *munsiffs* (as they are called) habitually took bribes to influence their administrative or judicial decisions, among the Christian *munsiffs* not one in a hundred did so."

Human nature is much the same all the world over, and it is not surprising that some heathen should wish to become Christians from motives which are not the highest. Particularly is this the case in the Mass Movements in India, where there is a temptation for the outcastes to embrace Christianity for the sake of obtaining social benefits. Should not we ourselves

eagerly embrace the chance of escaping from a condition of degradation and serfdom? The missionaries are well aware of this danger, and do all in their power to guard against it, by imposing long and severe tests upon would-be candidates for baptism.

Let us study facts before we make sweeping assertions. The more missionary work is examined in an unprejudiced spirit, the more will objections to it vanish. It is worth while to record the testimony of the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson: "I had conceived a great prejudice against missions in the South Seas; but I had no sooner come there than that prejudice was at first reduced, and then at last annihilated."

We may also remind ourselves in passing of the *indirect* results of foreign missions. Under this head I include the advance of geographical knowledge[1] and of the science of language, the humanizing of social life, the bringing of modern medical methods to countries where medical science is unknown, and above all, education. Wherever Christianity comes it brings with it benefits. To secure these additional benefits is not the object of the missionary. He is there to preach Christ, but in estimating the results of missions we cannot leave out of account these collateral effects.

(*c*) The Missionary Atmosphere

I include under this head the following kinds of objections, which, though they are quite

[1] See an article by the President of the Royal Geographical Society in the "Church Missionary Review" for December, 1919.

irrational, do undoubtedly create a temper of hostility to missions. Missionaries are so dull and narrow-minded. They are offensively pious. So many of them are ill-educated. They bore people because they can talk of nothing else than their work. They speak a religious jargon which the ordinary man finds it difficult to understand. In a word, they "put me off." I can imagine a rich Pharisee or Roman of the first century having the same kind of feelings about the first disciples. Who are these ignorant fishermen? Why should they worry me with their preaching? Suppose that some missionaries are ill-educated, cannot God make use of humble instruments for His work? And are all missionaries uneducated or narrow-minded? Some of the finest scholars in the world are to be found in the ranks of the missionary. And the various missionary societies are increasingly insisting that their agents shall be men and women of education, because they realize that the problems which they have to face are so complex and difficult. Suppose that we are "put off" by their earnestness, may not the fault lie in the quality of our discipleship? May it not be that we have yet to find out what true loyalty to Christ involves? Are there no dull people in other walks of life? Are we all broad-minded? How we are ruled by prejudice, and what a miserable thing it is!

(*d*) Why Trouble the Heathen? Why Not let Them Alone?

This is the last objection I want to consider. I suppose that what underlies it is a group of

arguments of the following sort: The heathen do not wish for Christianity; why force it on them? God made them, and they have developed the religion which suits them. Confucianism fits the Chinese, Hinduism the Indian. They will be judged according to their lights. They will not perish in hell, as was perhaps once believed.

Let us examine this objection under two heads.

(i) If we have the truth are we not bound to make it known? If Christianity is true, all men have a right to know it. The Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ are confessedly the most important facts in the whole history of the world. They mean more for humanity than any other facts. Is the world to be left in ignorance of them? What should we think of a doctor who discovered a cure for cancer, and then kept it to himself? That the heathen do not wish for Christianity is not surprising seeing that millions of them have never heard of its existence. They cannot wish for a thing which for them does not exist. Where they do know of it, they often only know a little about it, and so are unable to appreciate its worth; when they know more, they frequently show great eagerness to be instructed. This has been, and is, the case in Uganda. It is true also of many districts in China, where the demand for the Bible and Christian literature is great. But whether the heathen wish for Christianity or not, it is our duty to give it to them. Christianity is by its very nature a conquering and expansive religion. It deliberately challenges other faiths. Truth is always seeking to clear

untruth out of the way, or to turn partial truth into fuller truth.

(ii) As for the argument that the heathen have the religion which suits them, that entirely leaves out of account the purpose for which Christ came. He came just in order that the revelation which He brought might overspread the world. He came to dispel ignorance and superstition. It suits some people at home to live in squalor and dirt and to neglect their children. But we are not content to leave them so. All social reform aims at raising the level of human life. It suits the slave master to keep slaves and to treat them brutally. But, when the conscience of England awoke, England decided that there should be no slavery in her dominions. Who is suited by Hinduism? The oppressed outcastes, who for two thousand years have been degraded and ill-used? The child-widow whose life is such a drudgery that she seeks suicide? Heathenism in its working in every day life is a very different thing from heathenism as expounded in the sacred books of the heathen religions. We find in the latter many admirable precepts, and visions of lofty truth, but these are only translated into practice by a few. The mass of people in any heathen country live in great degradation, a prey to superstition and fears of the unknown, and they are at the mercy of the ruling class, or the witch-doctor or medicine man. Surely the religion which really suits men is the religion which enables them to make the best of themselves, which appeals to what is highest in them, which addresses itself to their undeveloped capacities. The soil which suits a

plant capable of rich growth is not a bed of gravel but of loam. Man should always be judged by what he has in him to become. Christianity is the most powerful agency in the development of human personality.

4. Failure to Realize our Personal Responsibility

I have left to the last the deepest reason for want of enthusiasm about missionary work. Many Christians do not realize that they have a personal responsibility in the matter. That they do have this I want to show. Many things mark off Christianity from other religions, but one of its most distinguishing features is the fact that it proclaims man to be a co-worker with God. Man and God are to work together in carrying out the divine purpose. I do not know of any other religion which gives such dignity to man, or places such a high responsibility upon him. Christianity tells of a divine purpose at work, the redemption of humanity, the formation of a kingdom of human beings ruled and inspired by Jesus Christ. That is the goal towards which the world is moving. But this divine purpose is, by its very nature, of such a kind that it cannot be carried out unless men co-operate with God in bringing it about. If a man makes a scientific discovery, the world will never know of it unless he writes about it, or tells others and they pass on the news. In the same way the Chinese will never hear about Christ unless some human being, or a group of human beings, will take the trouble to tell them. A moral or spiritual purpose can never be achieved except

through the human will. Every one will, I think, grant this. And this means that we have a responsibility towards our fellow-men. In so far as we are ready to admit that God has a purpose of the kind which I have described, we must also admit that men are in their measure responsible for seeing that that purpose is carried out.

The Obligation of Relationship to Christ

Let us now pass from the general statement to its particular application. Here am I, a Christian. Christ has done something for me, which, presumably, I value. He wants to do for every Chinaman and every Indian what He has done for me, for His purpose is world-wide and covers all humanity. If I really value what Christ has done for me, should I not want to help others to value it too? Am I not very selfish if I keep this valuable thing to myself? But perhaps I do not really value what Christ has done for me. Here, I think, we are getting to the heart of the matter. It is a question of my personal relation to Christ—difficult, perhaps, to write about, yet the key to the situation. Have we ever had a friend whom we loved deeply, who influenced us in many ways, whose interests we shared, whom we would spare no pains to help, one whose life was so bound up with our life that you could almost say the two lives were one? We should love him all the more if he had done some great act of service for us; we should cherish his memory when he was gone, and try to live in the power of his example. Is not the relation of the Christian to Christ a personal relation of this

kind? It of necessity carries with it the obligation to co-operate with Christ's purposes. Discipleship means the control of the life by Christ, the identification of the disciple with the purposes of the Master. Christ cannot mean very much to us unless we are prepared to surrender ourselves to His will. Utter loyalty and devotion to Christ is the mark of the real Christian.

Our Lord's Missionary Purpose

Now can there be any doubt that the great purpose which filled Christ's heart was a missionary purpose? He came to bring light to the world. Racial distinctions did not exist for Him. The revelation of God which He brought is world-wide. He wished all men to know about it. This statement is so obvious that it really needs no argument, but we may just notice two things.

(a) Though our Lord must have said much to the disciples in the forty days between the Resurrection and Ascension, only one command given in that period has been recorded — the command to go and preach the Gospel to the whole world. That is surely a remarkable fact, proving at any rate this: that the early disciples felt that the purpose which lay nearest to Christ's heart was the missionary purpose. We have four records of the command. The details vary, but the substance is the same. "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (St. Matt. xxviii. 19, R.V.). "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (St. Mark xvi. 15, R.V.). "Repentance and remission

of sins should be preached in His name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (St. Luke xxiv. 47, R.V.). "Ye shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i. 8, R.V.). There can be no question that our Lord laid upon the Church a great missionary obligation. How can we, if we profess loyalty to Christ, seek to avoid it?

Christ's Vision

(b) The other thing to notice is, that at several points in the narrative of our Lord's life we see Him possessed, as it were, by a great vision, projecting Himself into the future, and seeing by anticipation the results of His work. Take, for example, the following passage in St. John xii. 32, R.V. Some Greeks had come up to worship at the feast. They came to Philip and said that they wished to see Jesus. Jesus, hearing of it, says: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." And then He goes on to say: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." He saw in the attraction of these Greeks to Himself the beginning of that process by which all humanity was to be drawn to the uplifted Christ. He saw Himself on the cross as the great magnet attracting men. Or take the allegory of the good shepherd in St. John x. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd." It is the same vision of Himself gathering into one the scattered sheep—all precious in God's eyes, all waiting to be brought

into the fold of truth. Or once more take such a daring utterance as this, so tremendous in its claim, so full of hope for a world groping in the twilight: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me may not abide in the darkness" (St. John xii. 46, R.V.). Christ thinks of Himself as the bringer of light to all humanity. That utterance has no meaning unless it implies a missionary purpose. Almost all the sayings of Jesus about Himself and His work are charged with a missionary meaning. If His spirit and purpose are to be our spirit and purpose (and discipleship can mean nothing else) our missionary obligation is clear.

And so the searching question comes to each of us: Am I prepared to make the sacrifice which Christ demands of me? Is my following of Him such that I am ready to share His purpose? Do I care enough for Him to make this missionary obligation my own? Each must answer for himself. The questions test the quality of our discipleship.

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